

The Interview Process and How to Stop Hiring Toads

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Have you ever hired someone because they blew your socks off in the interview only to have them turn into a “toad” once they have become an employee? What happened? And more importantly, how can you avoid having it happen again?

What probably happened is that during the interview process, you subliminally switched from interviewing the person to trying to hire the person.

Let’s say you’ve had an open position for quite some time. Let’s say that you or your other employees have to cover for that position, and it’s straining the organization. Finally, a candidate appears at your door that at least looks the part. She sits down for the interview and, as she answers the first question, you observe that she is articulate and answering the question the way you wanted her to answer. The second question you ask probably became easier than the first; because you think she may be the one.

Suddenly, you move full speed into hiring mode. You tell her about the job. You sell her on the company. You sell her on the benefits and so forth. You do everything except interview her.

One way to keep from falling into that trap is to use a process called behavioral interviewing. This is a technique based on the fact that a candidate’s past and present behavior is the best predictor of how she will behave in the future. But behavioral traits don’t appear on a resume – they only appear in an interview. Furthermore, interviewers need to obtain repeated examples of a specific behavior to ensure that the behavior they’re observing is real.

By asking questions about past experiences, an interviewer can better predict future behavior by eliminating misunderstandings, preventing the “halo effect” and reducing the candidate’s ability to mislead.

Interviews not based on exploring competencies inevitably focus on education, experience and knowledge – exactly what’s on the resume. While these are clearly important, they only reveal what a candidate said they did. Behavioral interviewing helps get at the how and why behind a candidate’s performance and what he is likely to do in the future.

Here are some examples of behavioral or situational questions:

- “Who is the best boss you’ve ever worked for and what made them so good?”
- “Tell me about a difficult customer situation that you were able to satisfactorily resolve.”
- “Describe your job hunting process and desired outcome.”
- “Can you tell me about a time you had to complete a rush project with no resources and little distraction?”

Before you interview the candidate, it's important to establish timelines and guidelines. Here are some tips:

- Set the tone by establishing rapport and creating a pleasant atmosphere. Following the greeting, some small talk will help to relax the applicant and establish open communication.
- Set the agenda and take control of the interview, explaining what will occur during the 30-minute process. Let them know you will be taking notes.
- Gather information: Interviewing requires listening, probing, reflecting, summarizing and evaluating skills. The interviewer should talk only about 25 percent of the time and the candidate should talk the other 75 percent. Ask five to eight behavioral or situational questions similar to the ones highlighted in the article. Avoid questions that require only a yes or no answer.
- Describe the position and provide a realistic job preview. It's critical for candidates to receive an honest overview of job responsibilities, work climate, your expectations, compensation and other items. This is one of the most critical and yet overlooked steps in the interview process. Unrealistic expectations are a sure-fire recipe for disaster.
- Answer questions: The applicant's objectives are to gather information about the position as well as sell his or her attributes. Let them accomplish these objectives toward the end of the 30-minute interview.
- The conclusion: Ask the candidate what two things he/she wants to be sure you know about them. Thank him/her for their time and explain what will happen next (when the hiring decision will be made and how it will be communicated).

By establishing a behavioral interviewing process, you will be better able to leave the toads on their lily pads and hire people that will help your company grow and prosper.